



Avalanche recently conducted a deep qualitative listening survey with 546 Americans to understand how voters relate to the concept of abortion generally and to the regulation of abortion specifically. Our proprietary text analysis process enables a nuanced understanding of the values and beliefs important to American voters relating to the regulation of abortion, based on a large sample of open-ended data. (Methodology detailed on page 6).

**This research clearly demonstrates that the strong majority of Americans support reproductive Freedom.** While the public discourse on this topic often highlights the intense polarization associated with people's comfort with abortion, this research shows that despite a wide array of feelings about the issue, a strong majority of Americans ultimately oppose government bans and support reproductive freedom.

## TOPLINES

**A strong majority of American voters oppose the government preventing a woman from making her own decision about abortion.**

- 43% of voters support a woman's right to abortion and believe it should be legal and available
- An additional 29% of voters are personally against abortion, but do not believe the government should prevent a woman from making that decision for herself
- 26% of voters personally believe having an abortion is wrong and believe that it should be illegal

**Political discourse in America largely reflects only those who support unrestricted access and those who support government bans, largely ignoring a critical segment of 29% of the electorate. We call them the Freedom First segment:**

- They experience a spectrum of emotions about access to abortion, but are aligned in their anger, frustration, disgust, and fear about the regulation of abortion
- They are uncomfortable with the idea of personally accessing abortion, but they believe that abortion is and must be a personal decision made by each woman for herself
- They perceive restrictive regulation of abortion as an attack on personal freedom and as untoward government control
- They are equally likely to be liberal or conservative, but are unlikely to be strongly either
- They are unequivocal in their belief that women's personal freedom must be protected

## SUMMARY FINDINGS

**Our research shows that although recent public discourse on abortion would suggest that it's a highly polarized issue with clear sides and significant support on either side, the reality is quite different.** Instead we find that although American voters experience a spectrum of personal comfort with the decision to have an abortion, a very strong majority oppose government bans and support each woman's personal freedom to decide for themselves.

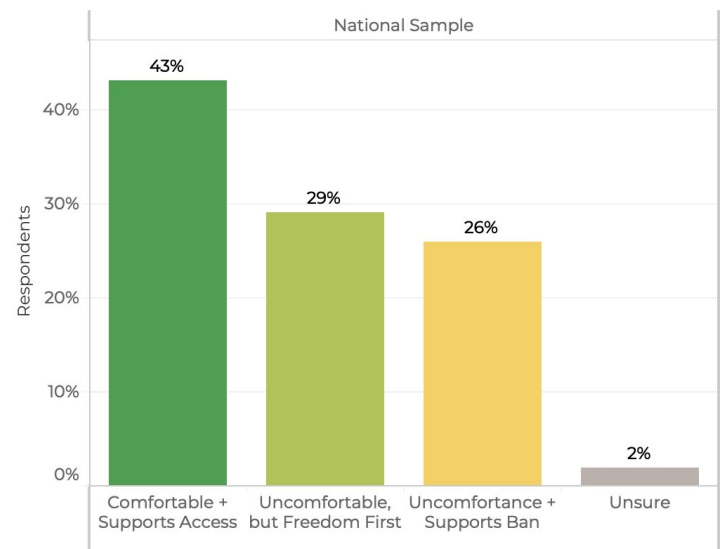
Furthermore, this research focuses on more deeply understanding the often ignored silent middle on reproductive rights - the 29% of likely voters who are personally uncomfortable with accessing abortion, but who prioritize freedom first and therefore oppose government interference in a woman's personal choice.

**We begin by validating widely accepted findings published by Pew and others that** the majority of Americans oppose government bans on abortion and support the protection of individual reproductive freedom. To begin to understand the nuanced decision making at play for Americans on this issue, we use a three point scale that allows respondents to indicate both individual comfort with accessing abortion, and the belief that abortion should be legal.

**This research suggests that position on access to abortion isn't a clearly drawn line and isn't nearly as polarized as the popular landscape might suggest.** A significant portion of American voters are personally uncomfortable with abortion, but strongly believe in individual freedom and oppose government bans.

How Americans View Access to Abortion

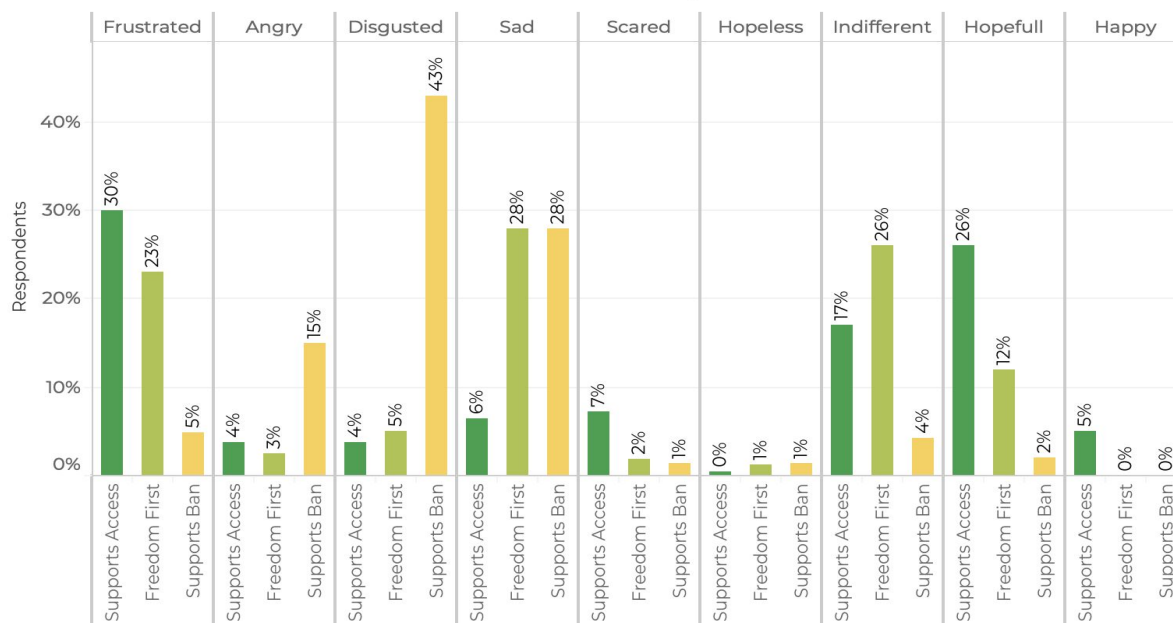
- **43%** are personally comfortable with the idea of accessing abortion AND believe it should be legal and easily available.
- **29%** are personally uncomfortable with the idea of accessing abortion AND do not believe the government should prevent a woman from making that decision for herself. We call them the Freedom First segment.
- **26%** are personally uncomfortable with the idea of accessing abortion AND believe it should be made illegal.



**While Americans express a spectrum of complex feelings about abortion itself, 72% are strongly aligned in their belief that amidst such complexity, the priority must be the protection of individual freedom.**

To understand this belief more deeply, we compare the feelings of Americans about the concept of accessing abortion, to their feelings about the current regulation of abortion.

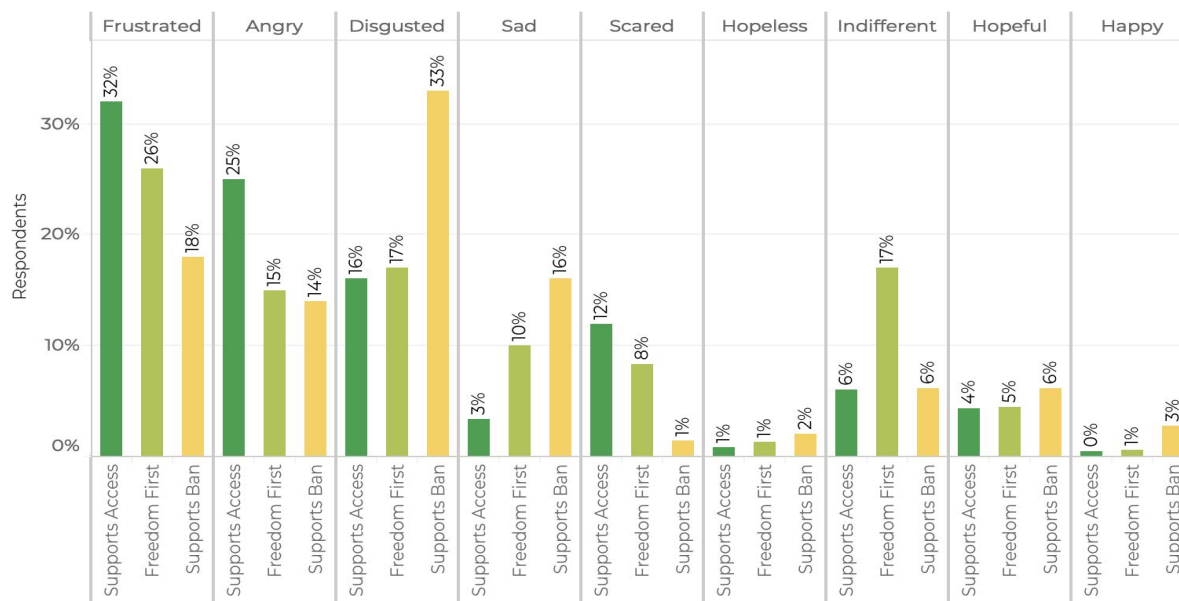
## First respondents are asked how they feel about access to abortion.



### Respondents report a spectrum of feelings about access to abortion itself, notably:

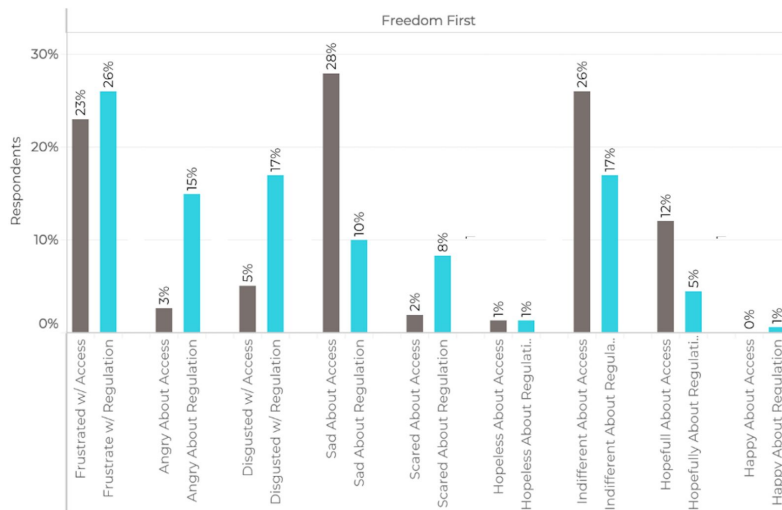
- **Frustration & hope** among those who are personally comfortable and support access
- **Disgust, sadness, & anger** among those who are personally uncomfortable and support bans
- **Sadness, indifference, & frustration** among those who are personally uncomfortable with abortion, but support individual freedom and legal access

### Respondents are then asked how they feel about the current regulation of abortion. A strong majority of respondents are aligned in their anger, frustration, disgust and fear about the current regulation of abortion.



While there are significant shifts across all segments, the most dramatic shift is among those who oppose government bans on abortion despite their personal discomfort with abortion.

**About the regulation of abortion, this Freedom First segment sets personal discomfort aside, moving from sadness and indifference about abortion itself - to frustration, anger, and disgust about the government restricting the individual freedom of women.**

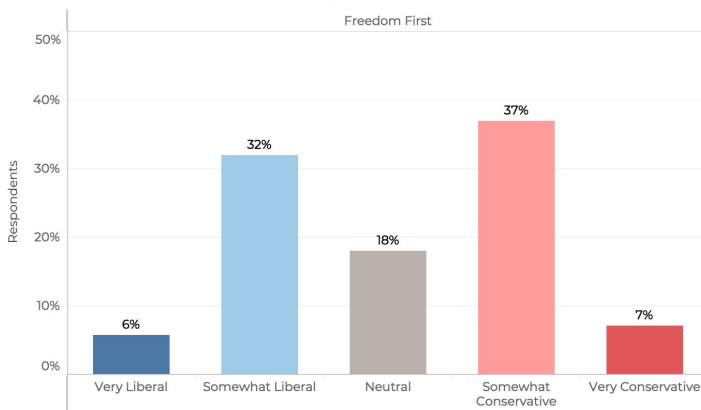


**Notably when thinking about regulation of abortion,** the Freedom First segment shifts towards strong support of access in the following ways:

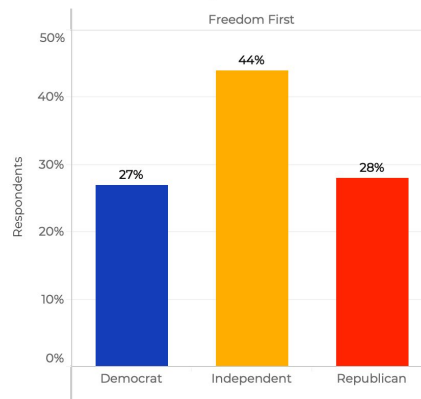
- 12% increase in anger
- 12% increase in disgust
- 6% increase in fear
- 18% decrease in sadness
- 9% decrease in indifference
- 7% decrease in hope

**This Freedom First segment is largely ignored in the current political debate, and represents critically overlooked segment of Americans.** Understanding this segment is critical to understanding where American voters are on access to abortion, and how out-of-step recent efforts to ban abortion are with the beliefs and desires of a strong majority of voters.

Freedom First: Political Ideology



Freedom First: Party Identification

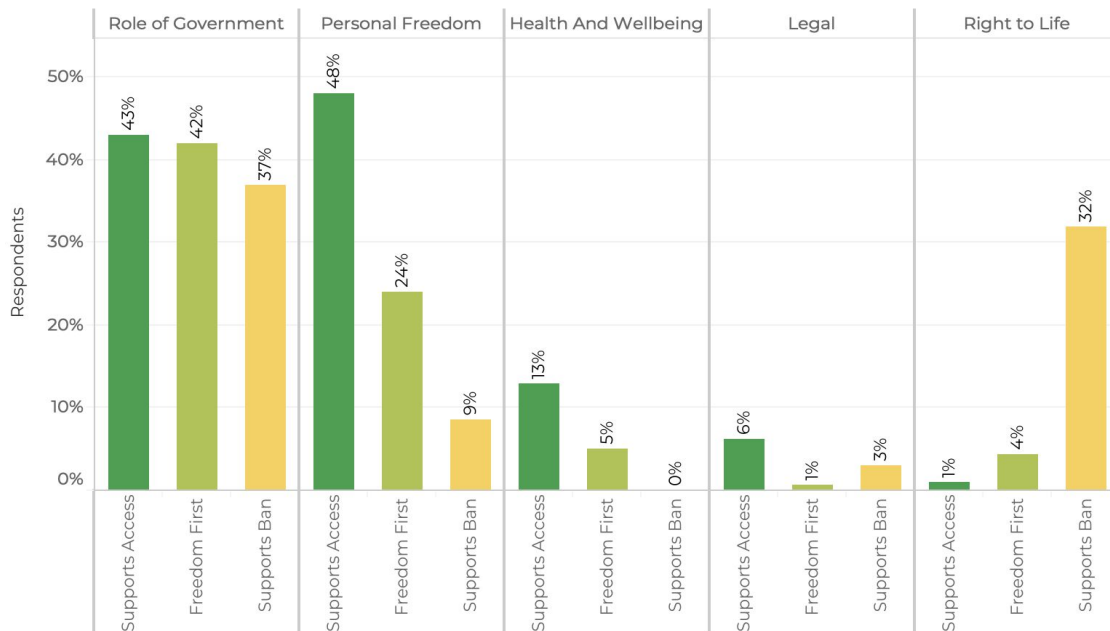


**The 26% of respondents who prioritize freedom first despite personal discomfort are a complex and politically important mix of voters. They are:**

- Likely to be either conservative or liberal, but unlikely to be strongly either
- Made up of 44% Independents, 27% Democrats and 28% Republicans
- Skewing only slightly female, with 56% women
- Skewing somewhat suburban

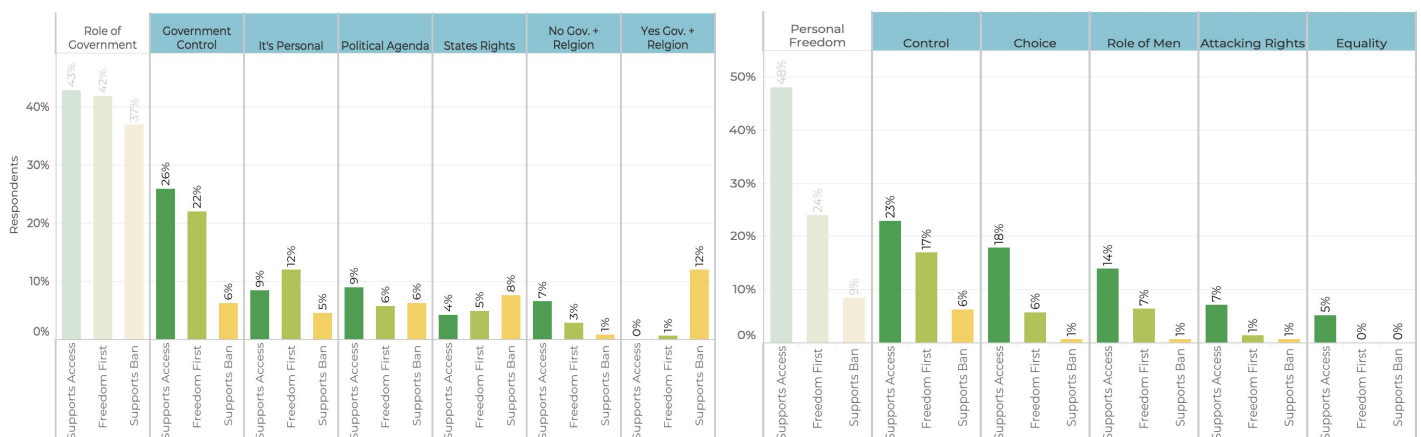
**To better understand how this critical and complex segment relates to access to abortion, we ask respondents to explain their feelings about the current regulation of abortion in an open-ended format.** Responses are coded and analyzed to bring quantitative rigor to a deep understanding of the priorities and considerations Americans are weighing about this issue.

**The Freedom First segment perceives restrictive regulation of access to abortion as untoward government control that limits the personal freedom of women.** For this segment, this isn't a question of liking or not liking abortion. It isn't a question of deciding to ever have an abortion.



A detailed breakdown of the two themes most important to the Freedom First segment reinforce and add color to the specific ways that freedom and control are motivating this segment of Americans to prioritize reproductive freedom over personal comfort with abortion.

Among respondents citing the themes **Role of Government** (left) or **Personal Freedom** (right), more detailed text analysis provides a breakdown of the topics most frequently mentioned.

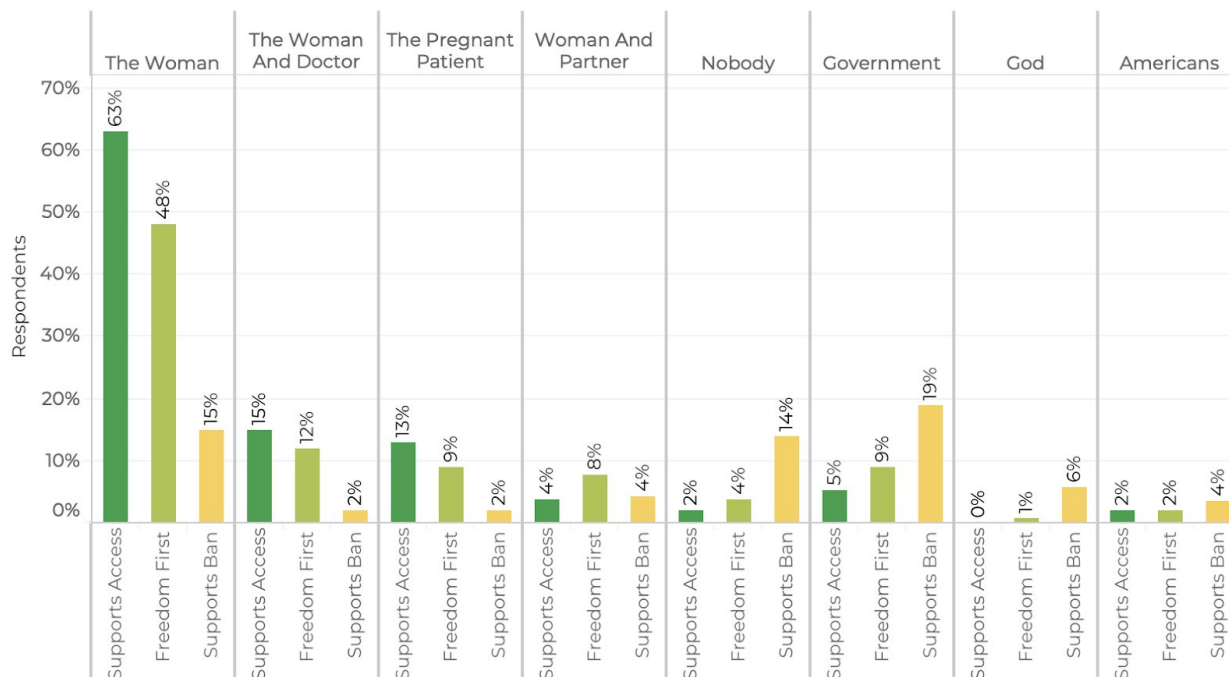


**It is clear that for the Freedom First segment, abortion is and must be a deeply personal decision, which must not be controlled by the government. In particular:**

- Government control is the most cited topic relating to the role of government
- Concern about control is the most referenced topic within personal freedom
- Personal decision making is referenced more by Freedom First than any other segment

Finally, in case there remained any confusion on where American voters stood on the question of who should decide who gets access to abortion, we asked them this question plainly and openly.

**American voters strongly believe that the decision to access or to not access abortion must be a personal decision made by the pregnant woman.** Text analysis was conducted to identify these top themes, presented by position on the issue.



**A strong majority of Americans voters are clear and articulate about their support for women's reproductive freedom.** When asked in an open-ended format to identify who should decide who gets access to abortion:

- 95% of those who support unrestricted access cite the woman or patient, with 19% also referencing support of a doctor or partner
- 77% of the Freedom First segment cite the woman or patient, with 20% also referencing support of a doctor or partner
- Only 19% of even those who support bans explicitly respond that they believe it is the role of government to decide who has access to an abortion

**This research clearly demonstrates that the strong majority of Americans support reproductive Freedom.** While the public discourse on this topic often highlights the intense polarization associated with people's comfort with abortion, this research shows that despite a wide array of feelings about the issue, a strong majority of Americans ultimately oppose government bans and support reproductive freedom.

## METHODOLOGY

Avalanche provides deep and accurate insight into the values, emotions, and beliefs that drive behavior on key issues. Our technology leverages both human expertise and natural language processing to quickly and accurately interpret and analyze large volumes of qualitative data. We deliver the depth of a focus group, with the scale of polling.

Since launching in 2017, Avalanche gained the backing of Higher Ground Labs and supported strategy and messaging for leading organizations in the progressive ecosystem.

An Avalanche Listening Survey combines open and close-ended questions to deeply understand how people relate to issues. Close-ended questions provide additional clarity and comparability with existing research, while open-ended questions provide rich and wholly novel data sets to understand the beliefs, values, and emotions through which segments of the public are currently relating to issues. Avalanche works with best-in-class data collection partners to gather targeted representative samples of respondents.

### **The Civiqs Panel**

The data in this report comes from a listening survey of 546 registered voters conducted using the Civiqs panel. Avalanche designed a Listening Survey, which Civiqs fielded to their online panel to collect responses. Raw data and weights were then provided from Civiqs to Avalanche for analysis. The Civiqs panel is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Civiqs employs a quota sampling procedure to ensure that the sample is demographically representative of the target population. Panelists are randomly recruited and not financially incentivized to complete surveys.

### **Data Collection Methodology**

Data for this report was collected from the panel between May 30 - June 3, 2019. To ensure representative samples from many specific subsets in addition to the national sample, the survey was emailed to over eleven thousand participants reflecting a completion rate of approximately 15%. More details on the Civiqs Panel and Targeted Survey methodology can be found [here](#).

### **Processing Methodology**

Avalanche uses a proprietary natural language processing system to analyze open-ended responses. First, important themes are identified through a combination of behavioral theory, computational techniques, and human expertise. These themes may include stories, tone, metaphor, or other elements of language. The chosen themes are then identified at scale with algorithms that ensure accuracy and rigor.

While particular elements may change from project to project, our technology consistently identifies the core aspects of how a person relates to an issue in terms of: priorities (the most salient aspects of the issue), values (the moral reasoning driving position), and emotion (the way a person feels about the issue). We customize the analysis for every project based on the insights of expert human reviewers to dynamically identify emergent themes. This allows humans to define the elements of speech that matter most, and the technology to identify those parts accurately across large datasets.



## Survey Sample Detail

From a large universe of potential American voters, we carefully constructed a sample, N=546, weighted to closely match the distributions of the 2018 electorate on gender, age, race, education, and political party, as reported by Pew. This sample also has a distribution of opinions on the legality of abortion that closely match nationally polled numbers.

While it is not possible to accurately forecast a 2020 electorate with confidence at this stage, we can compare the demographic distribution of the sample to the demographic distribution of [the 2018 Electorate according to Pew Research](#). This sample matches those distributions, and represents a highly plausible electorate.

We break the sample down into Democrats and Republicans, and show the percentage of each category in the Civiqs sample we used compared with the percentages reported by Pew, showing a consistently close match, within these subsets.

AGE	[18,30]	(30,45]	(45,65]	(65,105]
CIVIQS DEM	12	36	31	18
PEW 2018 DEM	16	32	27	25
CIVIQS GOP	9	24	41	24
PEW 2018 GOP	8	27	33	32

RACE	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
CIVIQS DEM	68	11	14	7
PEW 2018 DEM	65	20	15	5
CIVIQS GOP	97	1	1	1
PEW 2018 GOP	92	1	7	0

GENDER	Male	Female
CIVIQS DEM	37	63
PEW 2018 DEMS	38	62
CIVIQS GOP	54	46
PEW 2018 GOP	52	48

EDUCATION	< College	>= College	Non-Response
CIVIQS DEM	52	47	1
PEW 2018 DEM	56	43	N/A
CIVIQS GOP	53	43	4
PEW 2018 GOP	70	30	N/A

We also compare the geographic distribution of the Civiqs sample to the geographic distribution of the US population and find a very close match.

REGION	Northeast	Midwest	West	South
CIVIQS	17.5	19.8	24.2	38.5
CENSUS	17.2	20.9	23.8	38.1



Overall, we believe this sample is generally consistent with a reasonable expectation of likely supporters of either party at this early stage in the election. As with every poll, this instrument can and should be re-fielded in the future with both expanded and longitudinal samples, as estimates of likely voter demographics solidify leading up to the election.

## Question Wording

This summary of findings is based on a number of novel questions. Furthermore, our overall approach specializes in developing especially effective open-ended questions. As such, we are including the full wording of the questions on which these findings are based. For simplicity, we are not including basic demographic and screening questions, which are available upon request.

The Listening Instrument included other questions as well, the results of which are not included in this summary of findings. The order of response options for multiple choice questions were also randomized.

Question Name	Question Text	Type of response collected
Position	If you had to fit your opinion into a very simple bucket: Which of the following statements comes closest to your views?	- I personally support a woman's right to abortion and believe it should be legal and available - I am personally against abortion, but I do not believe government should prevent a woman from making that decision for herself - I personally believe having an abortion is wrong and should be illegal - Unsure
Emotions about access to abortion	What emotions do you feel, when you think about access to abortion?	Emotions
Emotions about regulation of access to abortion	What emotions do you feel, about how the government currently regulates access to abortion?	Emotions
Understanding why	Please help me understand WHY you FEEL the way you do.	Open
Decision maker	There are many different opinions about who should get access to abortion -- but in your opinion, who should make the decision, about who gets access to abortion?	Open